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Contact: Bonnie Nash
317-232-8596
bnash@dem.state.IN.us

IDEM's Tire Cleanup Helps Thwart West Nile

When each day brings new announcements of more West Nile virus cases, it's good to know the Indiana Department of Environmental Management is reducing potential mosquito breeding grounds. Through its illegal waste tire dump cleanups and its Waste Tire Management Rule, IDEM is helping keep the mosquito population down and protecting Hoosiers from mosquito-borne illnesses.

State health officials warn that thousands of Culex mosquitoes, which carry the West Nile virus, can breed in the stagnant water found in just one tire.

Nearly six million waste tires per year are thrown away in the state, and the majority of those now are being disposed of properly. Historically, that has not always been true. Over the past six years, more than 6.4 million tires have been cleaned up at illegal Indiana dump sites.

In 2001, an estimated 1.5 million tires were shredded and removed from tire dumps, and cleanup has continued throughout 2002. Most of IDEM's cleanup efforts have been funded from the Waste Tire Fund, which the Indiana Legislature created in 1992. From the sale of every new tire in the state, 25 cents must be deposited in the fund.

One of the state's largest tire dump cleanups, Atwood G&M Recycling site in Kosciusko County, will be complete in November. IDEM began work on the site when it had an estimated 4.5 million tires. Additional sites around the state where cleanup is underway include: Davenport Dump in Morgan County, Roland Dump in Lake County, Schwanke in Jasper County and the Starke County Garage.

Under the Waste Tire Management Rule, waste tire processors must submit a contingency plan to IDEM describing, among other things, the actions the processor will take to prevent mosquito breeding in water that may accumulate in waste tires. Operators are required to drain water from tires on the day they are received and process the tires within seven days to prevent water from collecting. This reduces the threat of mosquitoes spreading disease in the community.

State health officials also urge homeowners to protect their families and their community by disposing of any old tires on their property. The Marion County Health Department is sponsoring a free tire drop-off this Saturday, Sept. 21, from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. at the mosquito control location (4001 E. 21st St.). For more information on West Nile virus, visit the State Department of Health's Web site at <http://www.in.gov/isdh>.

IDEM's work in eliminating waste tires, along with the threat they pose as a mosquito habitat, is just one way the agency continues its commitment to protecting Indiana's environment.